



## **Under 35**

An Analysis of the Looking West 2006 Survey

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## The NEXT West Project

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The Looking West 2006 Survey is the fourth survey in the Looking West series (previous Looking West Surveys were conducted in 2001, 2003, and 2004). The Looking West Surveys tap into the views and opinions of western Canadians on a number of key public policy topics. The purpose of the Looking West Surveys is to inform the public, community leaders, government staff, and elected officials about the views and perspectives of western Canadians. Previous Looking West Survey reports can be found at [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca).

Additional Canada West Foundation reports based on the results of the Looking West 2006 Survey include *Consistent Priorities* released in May 2006, *Democracy in Western Canada* released in July 2006 and *Political Identities in Western Canada* released in September 2006. All of these reports can be found at [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca)

### **Researchers: Interested in Using the Looking West 2006 Survey Data?**

As part of the Canada West Foundation's commitment to encouraging ongoing research on western Canadian public policy issues, the Looking West 2006 dataset will be made available, free of charge, for nonprofit purposes to post-secondary institutions, academics, students and nonprofit agencies. Dataset availability is anticipated in January 2007. For more information, please contact Robert Roach, Director of Research ([roach@cwf.ca](mailto:roach@cwf.ca)).

## Executive Summary

The Looking West 2006 Survey included a wide range of questions on public policy priorities, political identity, and democratic participation and attitudes. The objective of the survey is to help western Canadians and their governments better understand the opinions and attitudes of western Canadians. *Under 35* presents an analysis of the opinions provided by the 2,000 western Canadians 18 to 34 years of age who took part in the survey. This group is referred to as the “under 35s” in this report.

A presentation of the public policy data for the full sample of 4,000 respondents (2,000 age 18 to 34 and 2,000 age 35 and over) can be found in *Consistent Priorities*, released by the Canada West Foundation in May 2006. The democratic attitudes and behaviours data for the full sample can be found in *Democracy in Western Canada*, released by the Canada West Foundation in July 2006. The political identities data for the full sample can be found in *Political Identities in Western Canada*, released by the Canada West Foundation in September 2006. All three reports are available at no charge from [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca).

Key findings of the report include:

### ■ **Identity**

Contrary to stereotype, under 35s are more likely to describe themselves as centrists than as left-leaning. This is true for all four western provinces. Under 35s identify with Canada, western Canada, their provinces, and their local areas. However, under 35s are almost as likely to identify with their age cohort as they are to identify with Canada or their province.

### ■ **Mobility**

Most under 35s expect to remain in their current province for at least five years. However, under 35s with graduate or professional degrees are more likely than those with less education to anticipate moving. In addition, under 35s in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are more likely to anticipate moving within five years than are under 35s in Alberta and British Columbia.

### ■ **National Unity**

Under 35s are quite confident that Canada will remain united in 20 years, but register high levels of indifference toward Quebec separation.

### ■ **Attitudes Toward Canadian Democracy**

Under 35s report a moderate level of interest in politics. The vast majority feels an obligation to vote, and many see volunteering in their community as an obligation. Under 35s do not relate to political parties or election campaigns. They are cynical about politicians, ambivalent about the media, and feel that large corporations have excessive power.

### ■ **Democratic Participation**

Under 35s are less likely to report voting than are over 35s. The reasons for non-voting are as likely to be personal (e.g., too busy) as they are to be political. Over 6 in 10 under 35s report participating in at least one political activity other than voting (e.g., contacting an elected official) in the past year; those who report such activities are also more likely to report voting. Under 35s report following current events, but not necessarily on a daily basis, and the majority of under 35s use newspapers as a source for current event information. Under 35s are more likely than over 35s to use the Internet as their information source. This is not surprising given that 7 in 10 under 35s report using the Internet on a daily basis.

### Executive Summary (continued)

#### ■ **Public Policy**

While many “mainstream” policy issues (such as health care) are important to under 35s, they are also concerned about a number of issues that receive relatively less attention, including poverty, post-secondary education, and international issues. There are a number of important policy priority differences between under 35s and over 35s, particularly with respect to international issues.

What does all of this mean for the future of western Canada and of Canada? There are a number of implications:

#### ■ **Potential for a new generation of western alienation.**

The relative confidence (and perhaps complacency) in the future of national unity, coupled with the considerably high level of indifference or negativity toward the place of Quebec in Confederation, suggests that future national unity efforts designed to keep Quebec in the national fold will be a hard sell among western Canadians under age 35. It is not hard to envisage a scenario in which a federal government, seeking to woo Quebec, will come under harsh criticism from the under 35s of western Canada, thus fueling a new generation of western discontent.

#### ■ **Potential for increased democratic disengagement.**

It is sometimes argued that young non-voters are participating in Canadian democracy in other ways, such as protest behaviour. However, the self-reported voting and democratic participation data strongly suggest that this belief is false: young non-voters are abstaining from most facets of Canadian democratic life. Given that non-voting is increasing amongst young people, this suggests that all forms of democratic engagement might be expected to decline in the years ahead.

#### ■ **Potential for an expanded or altered public policy debate.**

If – and this is a big if – under 35s can be brought more fully into the political process at all levels, from voting and letter writing to engagement in political parties and running for office, there is the potential for the scope of policy debate in Canada to be somewhat altered or expanded. Under 35s are more likely to be vocal on international issues, particularly those that are infrequently voiced in current debate.

#### ■ **Potential for a growing Manitoba/Saskatchewan – Alberta/BC labour and population divide.**

When it comes to growth, western Canada already has an east-west divide. The high anticipated mobility of young adults, specifically those from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, suggests that this divide may grow, rather than contract, in the years ahead unless these provinces make strong efforts to retain their young people, particularly their future “best and brightest.” These efforts will likely need to focus on career opportunities and quality of life, particularly in the large cities.

Under 35s represent the future of western Canada. They are the future political, business and community leaders. They are the current and future employees, workforce, taxpayers and service consumers. They are the current and future parents of the next generation of western Canadians. The Looking West 2006 Survey presents evidence of a significant disconnect between under 35s and conventional political life such as political parties and election campaigns. It is in the interest of all western Canadians – regardless of age – to identify ways to address and reduce this disconnect so to best ensure that the region can fully benefit from everything the West’s young adults have to offer.

## 1. Introduction

There are numerous assumptions and beliefs about young adults (those aged 18-34), particularly with respect to issues of democracy and public policy. Some of these beliefs may be holdovers from previous generations. Older generations may, for example, assume that the political issues that mattered to them at 25 are also of importance to today's 25 year olds. Other beliefs may have been created in reaction to the contrast between generations. For example, baby boomers may presume that today's young adults are politically apathetic simply because young adults are not *en mass* engaged in protest activities. And, of course, still other beliefs may exist because they reflect the truth.

*Under 35* uses public opinion data to explore a number of political beliefs about young adults. To get a better understanding of younger adults – or at least of younger adults residing in western Canada – the Canada West Foundation's Looking West 2006 Survey over-sampled the 18-34 year old cohort. The result is a large (2,000 person) sample of western Canadians under the age of 35, referred to as the "under 35s" in this report. These young adults were asked their opinions on a wide range of political and public policy topics; subjects discussed include political and social identities, democratic actions and beliefs, public policy attitudes, and expectations for the future. The resulting portrait provides a sharper perspective on western Canada's next generation of leaders and taxpayers, and how this generation may or may not transform the region.

The Canada West Foundation's Looking West Surveys are designed to provide valid and reliable data on western Canadian public opinion. The Looking West 2006 Survey is the fourth of the series; previous Looking West Surveys were conducted in 2001, 2003 and 2004. Unlike many other surveys, which often lump provinces together (thus obscuring important differences among the provinces) and/or have provincial sample sizes that do not allow for meaningful analysis of opinion in a single province, the Looking West Surveys use large provincial samples to allow for statistically significant analysis of each of the four western provinces (including urban-rural analyses). Indeed, the Looking West Survey is unique in its large sample size. In addition, the Looking West Surveys replicate a number of survey questions over the years, allowing for an analysis of attitudinal trends over time.

*Under 35* presents an analysis of the Looking West 2006 18-34 year old cohort data. The report focuses on the under 35 cohort, with occasional comparison to the age 35 and over cohort (referred to as the "over 35s" in this report). A presentation of the public policy data for the full dataset (both the 18-34 and the 35 and over age cohorts) can be found in *Consistent Priorities*, released by the Canada West Foundation in May 2006. The democratic attitudes and behaviours data for the full dataset can be found in *Democracy in Western Canada*, released by the Canada West Foundation in July 2006. The political identities data for the full dataset can be found in *Political Identities in Western Canada*, released by the Canada West Foundation in September 2006. Readers interested in demographic variations (such as province, gender, education, income, urban/rural, and other variables) in the responses to the survey questions presented in *Under 35* should consult these three prior Looking West 2006 Survey reports.

## 2. Methodology

Looking West 2006 is a random sample telephone survey of western Canadians 18 years of age or older. On behalf of the Canada West Foundation, Probe Research Inc. coordinated and administered the survey from February 23, 2006 to March 29, 2006 through its Winnipeg, Manitoba call centre DataProbe. It should be noted that this fielding window for the survey was purposely chosen in order to have at least one month separating the federal election of January 23, 2006 from the interview period.

To allow for statistically significant analyses of each province, as well as the West as a whole (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba), a large sample was used. A total of 4,000 residents were interviewed by telephone across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. With a sample of 4,000 across the region, one can say with 95% certainty that the results are within +/- 1.55 percentage points of what they would have been if the entire adult population of the region had been interviewed. The margin of

error is higher within the survey population’s sub-groups. The provincial breakdowns, and the margins of error, are presented in Figure 1.

In the presentation of aggregate western Canadian regional data, a weighting adjustment factor was applied to match each province’s sample weight to its portion of the regional population of those aged 18 years of age and over. Half of the respondents from each province were under 35 years of age, while the other half were 35 years of age or older. A weighting adjustment factor was applied to correct for this young adult over-sampling. The margin of error for the 18-34 sub-sample is +/- 2.19%. Because non-responses (“don’t know/refused”) are not reported in the tables or text, the displayed figures do not always add up to 100%.

**Figure 1:  
Sample Size and Margin of Error**

	Total N	Margin of Error +/- 95 times out of 100
BC	1,000	3.1%
Alberta	1,000	3.1%
Saskatchewan	1,000	3.1%
Manitoba	1,000	3.1%
Western Canada	4,000	1.55%

The margin of error for the 18-34 sub-sample is +/- 2.19%. Because non-responses (“don’t know/refused”) are not reported in the tables or text, the displayed figures do not always add up to 100%.

### 3. How Under 35s See Themselves

Political and personal identities matter in subtle but significant ways. Research suggests that identities shape not only how we see ourselves and present ourselves to the outside world, but also how we interpret political actions and respond to political choices. The question is, do the commonly held beliefs about under 35s match how they see themselves?

**3.1** Commonly held belief: young adults are left-leaning.  
**Reality: western Canadian under 35s are only somewhat left-leaning, and are more likely to be centrists.**

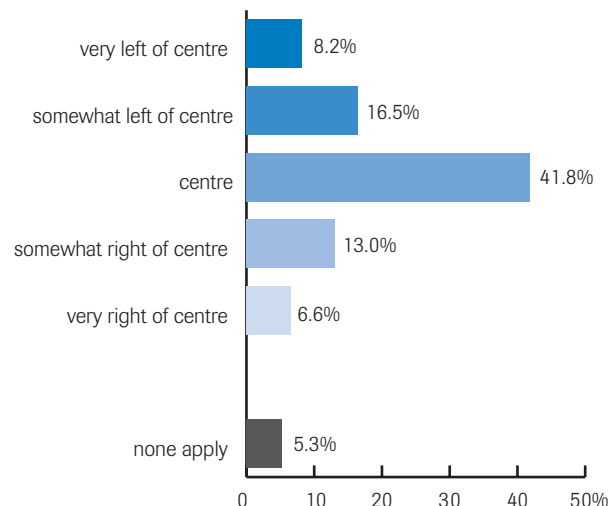
There is an adage (often mistakenly attributed to Winston Churchill) that goes: “If you’re not a liberal when you’re 25, you have no heart. If you’re not a conservative by the time you’re 35, you have no brain.” (Another variation is “a young man who is not a socialist has no heart; an old man who is not a conservative has no brain.”) By this logic, the under 35s should be slightly to the left of centre on the political spectrum.

Are young adults really left-leaning? Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked: “In politics we often hear people talk about being “right of centre,” “left of centre” or “centrist.” On a five point scale, with one being very left of centre, three being centre, and five being very right of centre, where would you place yourself?”

The results to this question are interesting, with survey responses forming a slightly left-leaning curve. Over 40% of respondents under 35 categorize themselves as a three (centre), while 24.7% describe themselves as either somewhat or very left of centre, and 18.6% describe themselves as either somewhat or very right of centre. Only 5.3% of respondents report that these political categories do not apply to them.

**Figure 2: Under 35s Self-Placement on the Left-Right Political Spectrum**

*“In politics we often hear people talk about being “right of centre,” “left of centre” or “centrist.” On a five point scale, with one being very left of centre, three being centre, and five being very right of centre, where would you place yourself?”*



Although one might presume that the youngest respondents would be the ones most likely to describe themselves as left of centre, there are no significant differences between 18-24 year olds and the 25-34 year olds on this question.

While the plurality of under 35s favour the centre, they are still more likely than over 35s to describe themselves as left of centre: 49.1% of over 35s describe themselves as centrists, and only 19.4% of over 35s place themselves on the left (five percentage point below the under 35s). For over 35s, 20.1% of respondents place themselves on the right, similar to the under 35 levels.

Overall, then, there is a kernel of truth in the assumption that young adults are left-leaning, but it is a small kernel: western Canadian under 35s are more likely to be centrists than to position themselves on either side of the left-right spectrum.

**3.2** Commonly held belief: BC young adults are left-leaning, Alberta young adults are right-leaning.  
 Reality: the ideological differences between under 35s across the western provinces are modest.

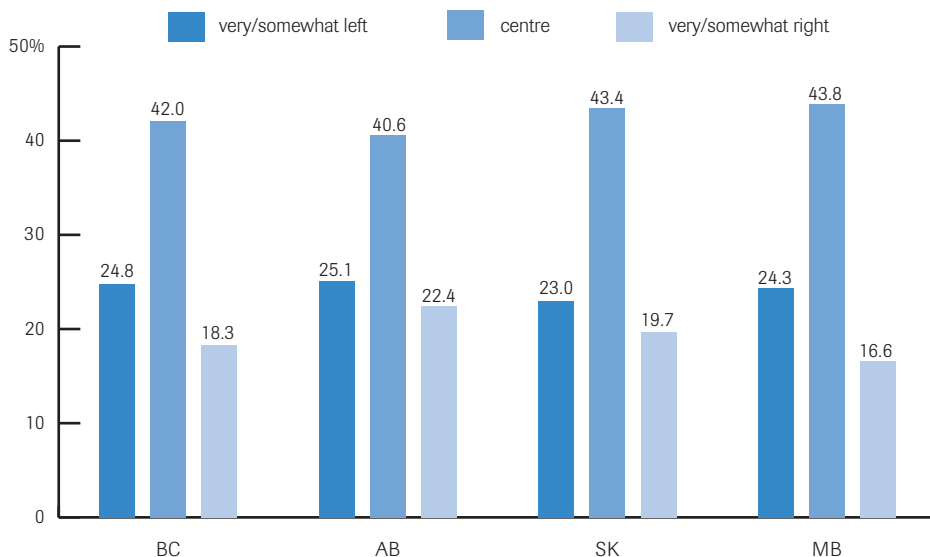
There are numerous provincial stereotypes in Canada: British Columbia is often seen as the more left-leaning province, Alberta as right-leaning, Saskatchewan as a mix of left and right, and Manitoba as the centrists in the centre of the country. But while these provincial stereotypes may reflect how outsiders see the province, they do not necessarily reflect how the province’s residents see themselves.

For the under 35s, the ideological self-identification question provided only modest support for provincial stereotypes. Across all four provinces, the same pattern is observed, with the plurality describing themselves as centrists. And across all four provinces, a quarter describes themselves as somewhat or very left of centre.

While the provinces each have a similar picture when it comes to the political left, differences can be found with respect to the political right. True to stereotype, Alberta under 35s are more likely than under 35s from other provinces to describe themselves as somewhat or very right of centre. However, it should be stressed that – as in the other western provinces – a greater number of Alberta under 35s describe themselves as somewhat or very left of centre than describe themselves as right of centre.

**Figure 3: Under 35s Left-Right Political Spectrum by Province**

*“In politics we often hear people talk about being “right of centre,” “left of centre” or “centrist.” On a five point scale, with one being very left of centre, three being centre, and five being very right of centre, where would you place yourself?”*





While one might have expected the left-right gap to be between “left coast” BC and “cowboy” Alberta, the gap between these two provinces is overshadowed by the gap between Alberta and Manitoba. The number of Manitoba under 35s describing themselves as somewhat or very right of centre is almost six percentage points below Alberta.

Provincial differences, to the extent that they exist, are modest and fail to fulfill stereotypes. It must be stressed, however, that these data reflect ideological *self-placement*; it is entirely possible that one may see herself as a centrist while others see her as right or left of centre.

### 3.3

Commonly held belief: young adults do not identify with Canada, their province, their local community or with western Canada.

Reality: the majority of under 35s identifies with Canada and its parts.

It is occasionally argued that “traditional” geographic identities do not matter to young adults. To examine a range of political identities, Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked:

“I am going to read a list of different groups of people and geographic locations. For each one, I would like you to tell me how close you feel to people in these groups, or to the geographic location identified. On a scale of one to five, where a one means that you feel “not at all close” to people in this group and a five means that you feel very close to people in this group, how close would you say you are to [each identity]?”

Ten potential identities were included. Six of these were geographic:

- the city, town or rural area in which you live
- western Canada – that is, BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba as a region
- a country other than Canada
- province
- Canada
- the global community

Four identity questions focused on more personal factors:

- people who are close to your age
- people who share your political beliefs
- people who share your ethnic background
- people who share your religion or faith

In addition, after these 10 identity questions, respondents were asked an open-ended question: “Are there any other groups of people or locations that we have not yet mentioned that you closely identify with? What are they?”

A summary of the geographic identities data is presented in Figure 4. There are a number of notable findings:

- There is no geographic identity with which a majority of respondents report a very close identification.
- The under 35s identify with their provinces as much as they identify with Canada.
- Six in 10 respondents closely or very closely identify with their local community – almost equal to the number that identify with Canada or their province.
- Over 5 in 10 respondents identify with western Canada (and one-quarter very closely identify with the region) – a strikingly high number given that the region does not have an institutional form or political role.
- Almost 3 in 10 respondents identify with a country other than Canada and/or the global community.

Clearly, there is considerable variation with respect to geographic identities, with national and provincial identities being the strongest, and local and regional identities not far behind. The geographic identity data demonstrate that identities are multi-faceted, and that young western Canadians see themselves as part of multiple geographic groups.

3.4

Commonly held belief: young adults identify less with Canada than do older adults.

Reality: it is true – under 35s identify less with Canada than do over 35s.

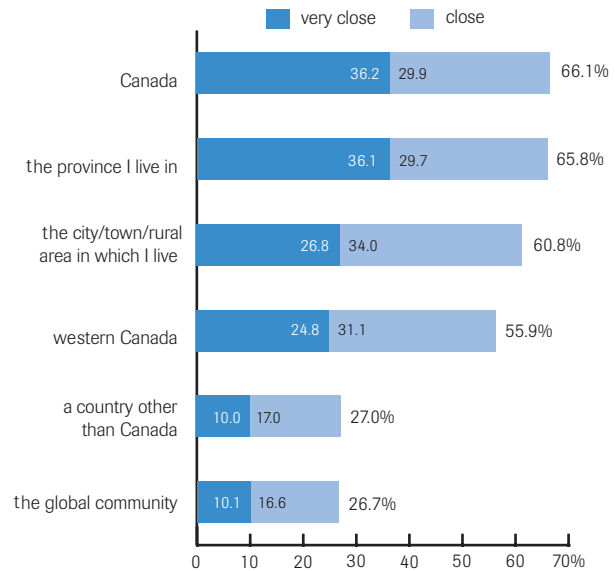
Identities can provide insight into the health of a polity: governments draw their legitimacy from the attachments of their citizens to their political communities. If citizens are not strongly attached to their nation, the strength and legitimacy of the government are lessened. It is often suggested that Canada, and being Canadian, matters less to young adults than it does to older generations.

In terms of identification with Canada, a significant difference is seen between the under 35s and the over 35s. While over 7 in 10 over 35s identify with Canada – and 5 in 10 feel very close to Canada – less than 7 in 10 of the under 35s report a close or very close national identification, and less than 4 in 10 report feeling very close to Canada. Indeed, almost one-quarter of western Canadians aged 18-34 report only a moderate identification with Canada. This finding suggests that, if under 35s do not develop a stronger identification with Canada, Canadian nationalism *may* decline over time. Alternatively, the somewhat lower identification with Canada among under 35s in western Canada may reflect an age-specific trend that will dissipate over time.

It should also be noted that under 35s are less likely to identify with *all* Canadian geographic identities than over 35s (see Figure 6). In other words, it is not just national identities that are weaker among under 35s, but rather geographic identifications overall.

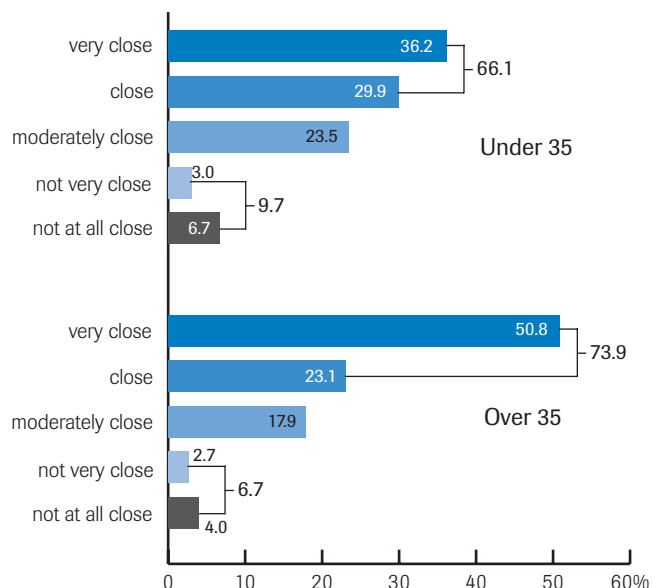
**Figure 4: Under 35s Close/Very Close Geographic Identities**

*"I am going to read a list of different groups of people and geographic locations. For each one, I would like you to tell me how close you feel to people in these groups, or to the geographic location identified. On a scale of one to five, where a one means that you feel "not at all close" to people in this group and a five means that you feel very close to people in this group, how close would you say you are to [each identity]?"*



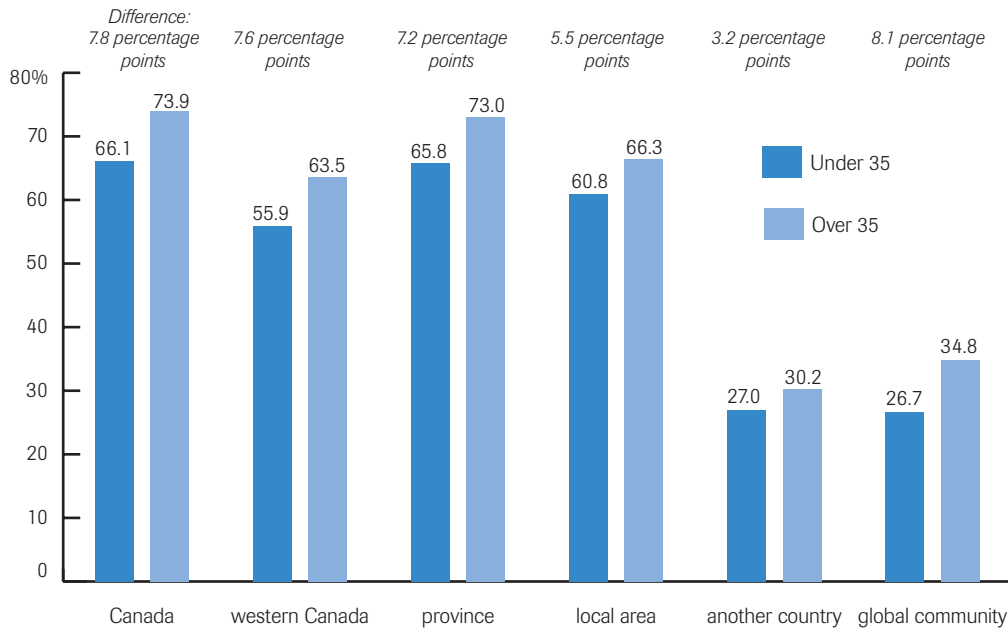
**Figure 5: Under 35s and Over 35s Identification with Canada**

*"I am going to read a list of different groups of people and geographic locations. For each one, I would like you to tell me how close you feel to people in these groups, or to the geographic location identified. On a scale of one to five, where a one means that you feel "not at all close" to people in this group and a five means that you feel very close to people in this group, how close would you say you are to [each identity]?"*



**Figure 6: Under 35s and Over 35s Close/Very Close Identification with Geographic Areas**

"I am going to read a list of different groups of people and geographic locations. For each one, I would like you to tell me how close you feel to people in these groups, or to the geographic location identified. On a scale of one to five, where a one means that you feel "not at all close" to people in this group and a five means that you feel very close to people in this group, how close would you say you are to [each identity]?"



**3.5**

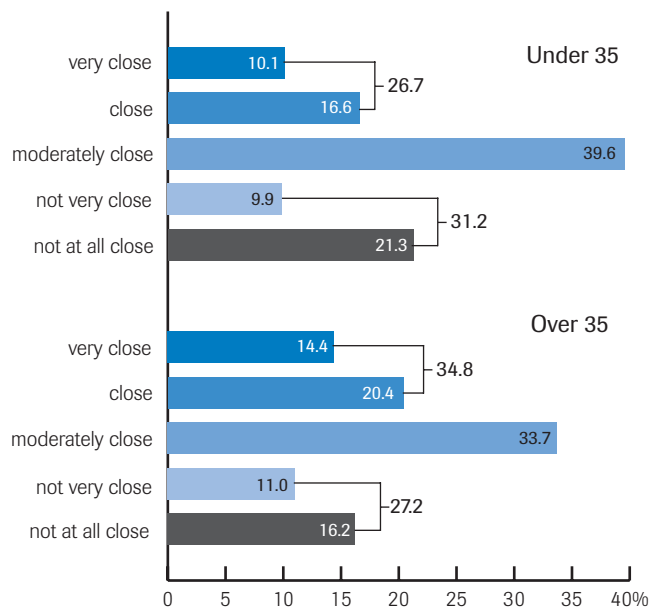
Commonly held belief: young adults identify with the global community more than older adults.  
 Reality: the opposite is true - over 35s identify with the global community more than under 35s.

Young adults have grown up in an age of globalization, free trade, world travel and international communications. This has led to the belief that young adults are more globally-oriented, and more likely than previous generations to identify with the larger global community.

However, the Looking West 2006 Survey data suggest the opposite: it is the over 35s who are more likely to identify with the global community. Indeed, about one-third of the over 35s feel close to the global community, compared to about one-quarter of the under 35s.

**Figure 7: Under 35s and Over 35s Identification with Global Community**

"I am going to read a list of different groups of people and geographic locations. For each one, I would like you to tell me how close you feel to people in these groups, or to the geographic location identified. On a scale of one to five, where a one means that you feel "not at all close" to people in this group and a five means that you feel very close to people in this group, how close would you say you are to [each identity]?"



3.6

Commonly held belief: for young adults, social identities are more relevant than geo-political identities.  
 Reality: under 35s identify strongly with their age cohort and less so with other social groups.

Identities are not just geographic: one can also identify with a variety of social groups. It is sometimes suggested that social identities – particularly age groups – matter more to young adults than geographic identities. Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked to rate their identification with four groups: people who are close to their age; people who share their ethnic background; people who share their political beliefs; and people who share their religion or faith.

**Figure 8: Under 35s Close/Very Close Identification with Social Groups**

*"I am going to read a list of different groups of people and geographic locations. For each one, I would like you to tell me how close you feel to people in these groups, or to the geographic location identified. On a scale of one to five, where a one means that you feel "not at all close" to people in this group and a five means that you feel very close to people in this group, how close would you say you are to [each identity]?"*

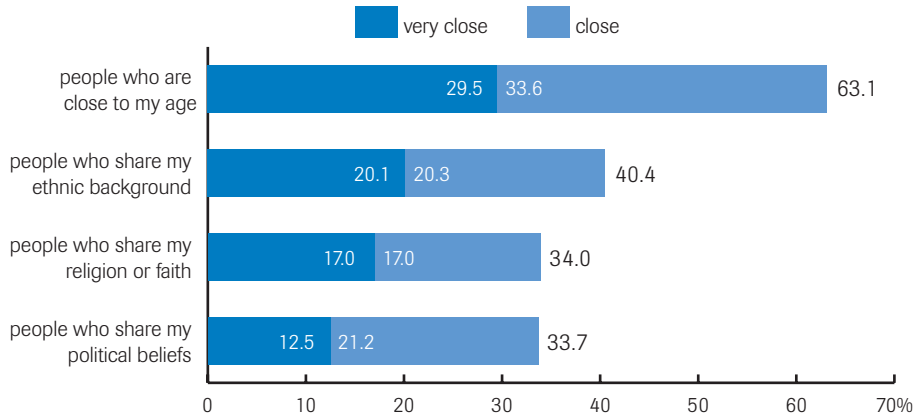


Figure 8 summarizes the personal identities data for the under 35s. Some findings of note:

- The percentage of respondents identifying with their age group is almost as high as the percentage identifying with Canada and/or with their province. In other words, age identifications nearly match national and provincial identifications.
- Four in 10 respondents very closely or closely identify with people who share their ethnic background, while 3 in 10 report either not closely or not at all identifying with their ethnic group.
- A greater percentage of respondents (38.2%) report either not closely or not at all identifying with people who share their religion or faith than report a very close or close identification with people of the same religion or faith (34.0%).
- Roughly one-third of respondents report that they closely or very closely identify with people who share their political beliefs, while another third reports either not closely or not at all identifying with people based on political beliefs, and the remaining third reports a moderate political identification.

Given the time constraints of a large public opinion survey, it is difficult to include and assess all possible forms of personal identity. For this reason, after the list of identity questions, Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked the following open-ended question: "Are there any other groups of people or locations that we have not yet mentioned that you closely identify with? What are they?" Up to three additional forms of identity were recorded. Over 8 in 10 under 35s report that they do not have any additional forms of identity to add. For those under 35s who did have identities to add, a total of 19 different identities were mentioned, with none receiving mention by more than 3% of respondents. (Examples of other identities include other regions in Canada; other provinces in Canada; people who share hobbies or sporting interests; somewhat left-leaning, they by and large describe themselves as centrists.)

**How Under 35s See Themselves: Summary**

Identities are important because they help to shape and influence political attitudes and behaviours. While their impact on Canadian democracy may be somewhat opaque and indirect, political identifications are useful to examine and understand. The Looking West 2006 Survey demonstrates that geographic identities, age and (to a lesser extent) ethnic cohorts are of particular relevance to western Canada's under 35s. The findings also reveal that, while under 35s are somewhat left-leaning, they by and large describe themselves as centrists.

## 4. How Under 35s See the Future

What do under 35s anticipate for their future? It is often suggested that young adults are highly mobile, and that they see themselves moving to large urban centres or to the United States. It is also suggested that young adults are confident about national unity. The latter assumption is based on the fact that, while national unity concerns bubbled strongly in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, the past 10 years have been rather calm on the national unity front, and young adults likely expect more of the same.

Are these assumptions true? Do young adults see a future marked by a high degree of personal mobility and a united Canada? It is to these questions that we now turn.

### 4.1

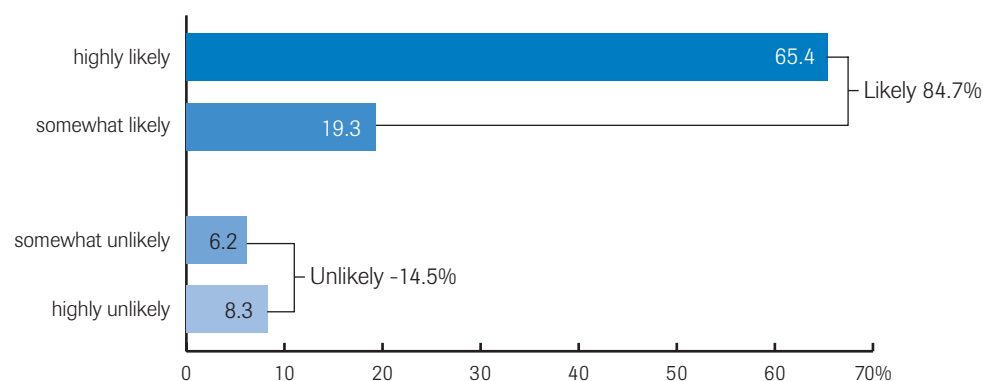
Commonly held belief: young adults see themselves as highly mobile.

Reality: most under 35s expect to be living in the same province in five years.

Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked: "When you think of your life five years from now, how likely is it that you will still be living in [province]?" The results suggest that under 35s do not see themselves as mobile as one might expect: over 8 in 10 feel it is likely they will remain in their province for the next five years. Less than 2 in 10 expect to move out of their province.

**Figure 9: Under 35s Likelihood of Remaining in Province**

"When you think of your life five years from now, how likely is it that you will still be living in [province]?"



### 4.2

Commonly held belief: Saskatchewan and Manitoba young adults are more likely to anticipate moving than are BC or Alberta young adults.

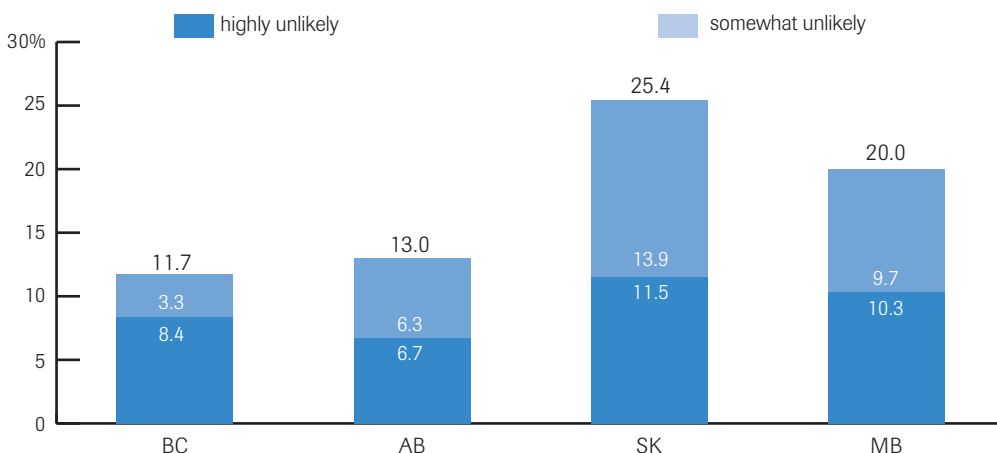
Reality: it is true – Saskatchewan and Manitoba under 35s are much more likely than BC or Alberta under 35s to anticipate moving in the next five years.

If it is true that "the children are our future," there is bad news for Saskatchewan and (to a lesser degree) Manitoba, as a significant number of under 35s anticipate leaving the province within five years. In Manitoba, 2 in 10 state that it is unlikely that they will remain in the province in five years. The picture is worse for Saskatchewan, where fully one-quarter anticipate leaving. In contrast, just over 1 in 10 BC and Alberta under 35s see themselves leaving their province in the next five years.

Given that under 35s represent not only a significant proportion of a province's current and future work force and tax base, but also a province's current and future parents (and thus the suppliers of the next generation of workers, taxpayers and parents), a high number of under 35s anticipating a move out of province represents a worrisome trend.

**Figure 10: Under 35s Unlikely to Remain in Province**

*"When you think of your life five years from now, how likely is it that you will still be living in [province]?"*



**4.3**

Commonly held belief: young adults with advanced education are more likely to anticipate moving than are young adults without advanced education.

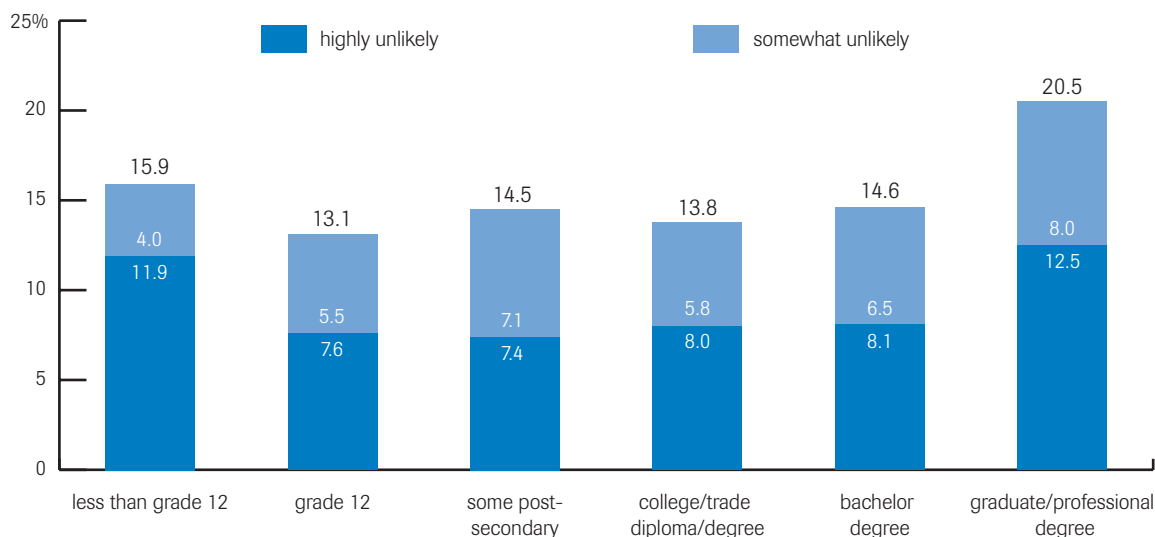
Reality: it is true – under 35s with graduate or professional degrees are more likely to anticipate moving.

Are the “best and the brightest” more likely to move away? Yes, they are somewhat more likely to anticipate moving: 20.5% of respondents under age 35 who have a graduate or professional degree anticipate moving out of their province within the next five years, compared to between 13.1% and 15.9% for those with less education. If these expectations are actualized, this will represent a significant movement of doctors, engineers, nurses, lawyers, academics, social workers, and other high-skilled professionals.

Interestingly, for Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the anticipated mobility of respondents under 35 with bachelor degrees, some college or university and, in Saskatchewan, college or trade diplomas is higher than the anticipated mobility of respondents with graduate or professional degrees. In Saskatchewan, 31.3% of respondents with some college, 31.8% of respondents with

**Figure 11: Under 35s Unlikely to Remain in Province by Education**

*"When you think of your life five years from now, how likely is it that you will still be living in [province]?"*



a college or trade diploma, and 21.4% of respondents with a bachelor degree state that it is somewhat or very unlikely that they will be living in Saskatchewan in five years; only 16.7% of respondents with graduate or professional degrees make this same claim. In Manitoba, 20.5% of respondents with some college and 30.0% of respondents with a bachelor degree state that it is somewhat or very unlikely that they will be living in the province in five years; only 11.1% of respondents with graduate or professional degrees state it is unlikely they will remain in the province.

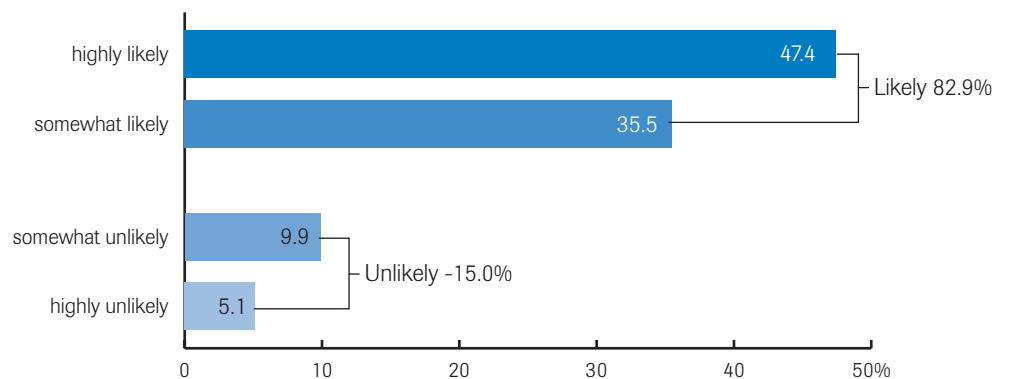
**4.4** Commonly held belief: young adults are confident about national unity.  
 Reality: it is true – under 35s are quite confident that Canada will remain united in 20 years.

Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked, “Thinking ahead 20 years, how likely do you think it is that Canada will still be united, that is, with all 10 provinces remaining part of Canada? Highly likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely or highly unlikely?”

The vast majority of under 35s feel it is likely that Canada will be united in 20 years, with almost one-half of all respondents stating that continued national unity is highly likely.

**Figure 12: Under 35s National Unity Likelihood**

“Thinking ahead 20 years, how likely do you think it is that Canada will still be united, that is, with all 10 provinces remaining part of Canada? Highly likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely or highly unlikely?”



**4.5** Commonly held belief: young adults are less committed to national unity than are older adults.  
 Reality: under 35s and over 35s share views on western separatism, but under 35s register higher levels of indifference toward Quebec separatism.

Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked about both western separatism and Quebec separatism. First, respondents were asked about western separatism:

“There is occasionally talk about western separation, that is, the separation of some or all of the four western provinces from Canada. Thinking specifically of [province], which of the following statements best represents your views? [Province] should separate from Canada and become an independent country on its own; [Province] should separate from Canada and become an independent country with BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; [Province] should not separate from Canada; or I do not care if [Province] does or does not separate from Canada.”

Second, respondents were asked about Quebec separatism:

“The issue of Quebec separation has been a topic of national debate for decades. Which of the following statements best represents your views? Quebec should separate from Canada; Quebec should not separate from Canada; or I do not care if Quebec does or does not separate from Canada.”

The results suggest that, when it comes to western separatism, under 35s are as committed to national unity as are the over 35s. Under 35s are less likely than over 35s to state that their province should separate from Canada, although the difference is very small. Under 35s are also more likely than over 35s to state that they do not care if their province separates from Canada – but again, the difference is very slight.

While under 35s are rather emphatic that their own provinces should not separate, they are less emphatic about Quebec separation: almost 3 in 10 state that they don't care if Quebec separates. This is a high level of indifference, and over seven percentage points higher than the indifference displayed by over 35s. However, for both age cohorts, only 1 in 10 state Quebec should separate – the same number that state their own province should separate. This indicates a sense of apathy or indifference toward national unity, rather than overt antagonism toward Quebec.

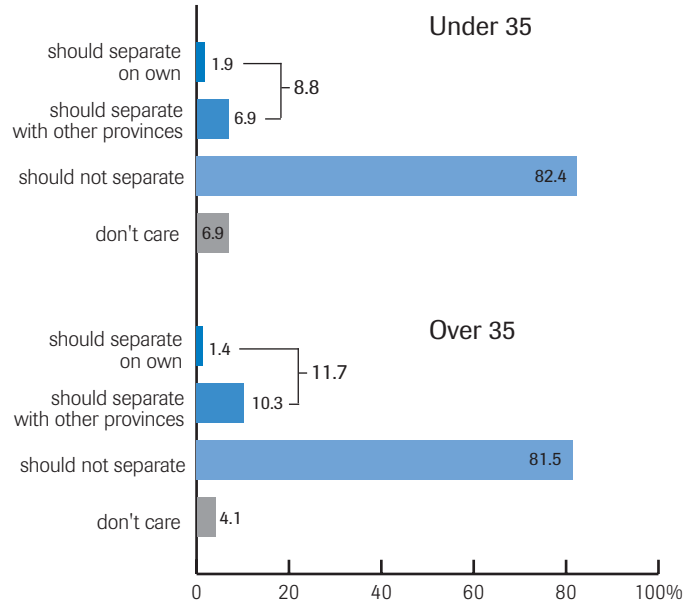
**How Under 35s See the Future: Summary**

Concerns about “brain drain” and “youth drain” are nothing new, particularly for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The fact that the vast majority of under 35s – including those with advanced education credentials – see their future in their current province of residence bodes well for the western provinces. However, the proportion of under 35s who anticipate leaving their province is not insignificant. On top of this, it must be remembered that intentions to remain in a particular province can be quickly changed if greater opportunities emerge elsewhere. The challenge for the western provinces is to ensure that overall quality of life – including employment opportunities and standard of living – is sufficient to retain young adults.

Perhaps more concerning, although less frequently discussed, is the growing indifference among under 35s toward national unity, more specifically to Quebec's place in Canada. A full 4 in 10 either do not care if Quebec separates or actively want Quebec to separate.

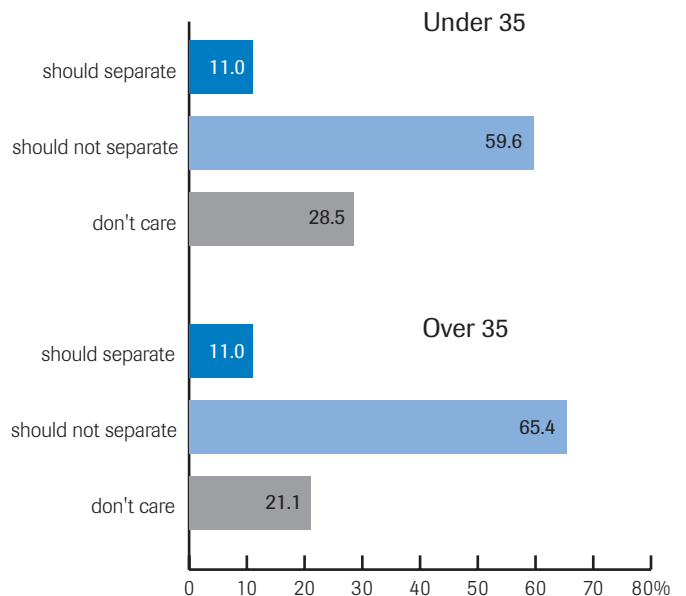
**Figure 13: Under 35s/Over 35s Support for Western Separation**

*“There is occasionally talk about western separation, that is, the separation of some or all of the four western provinces from Canada. Thinking specifically of [province], which of the following statements best represents your views? [Province] should separate from Canada and become an independent country on its own; [Province] should separate from Canada and become an independent country with BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; [Province] should not separate from Canada; or I do not care if [Province] does or does not separate from Canada.”*



**Figure 14: Under 35s/Over 35s Support for Quebec Separation**

*“The issue of Quebec separation has been a topic of national debate for decades. Which of the following statements best represents your views? Quebec should separate from Canada; Quebec should not separate from Canada; or I do not care if Quebec does or does not separate from Canada.”*





**Hot Topic: Under 35s and Terrorism**

Concerns about terrorism are a relatively recent dimension to the Canadian consciousness; prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, national security and terrorism were rarely topics for discussion and policy debate.

How do under 35s feel about terrorism? To assess expectations with respect to terrorism, respondents were asked, “Thinking ahead to the next five years, how likely do you think it is that Canada will experience a major terrorist attack? Highly likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely or highly unlikely.” (It should be noted that the survey was conducted prior to the arrests of members of a Canadian terrorist ring in Ontario in spring 2006.) The survey results indicate that under 35s feel very safe from terrorism on their home soil: 67.0% state that a terrorist attack is unlikely compared to 30.8% stating that it is likely.

Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were also asked to rate “protecting Canada from terrorist attacks” as a high priority, medium priority, low priority, or not a priority. Three-quarters (74.6%) of the under 35s rate protecting Canada from terrorism as a high or medium priority compared to 24.8% who rate it as a low priority or not a priority. This suggests that, despite feeling relatively safe from an attack, there is strong support among under 35s for anti-terrorism measures.

**5. How Under 35s See Canadian Democracy**

In recent decades, many commentators have expressed concern about growing apathy in democracies around the world. Canada has not been immune to this perception, and low levels of voter turnout in recent elections only reinforce arguments that Canadians – and particularly young Canadians – are less interested and less engaged in democratic life. To get a sense of the extent to which western Canadians are, or are not, apathetic about politics, the Looking West 2006 Survey included a battery of questions about democratic behaviours and attitudes.

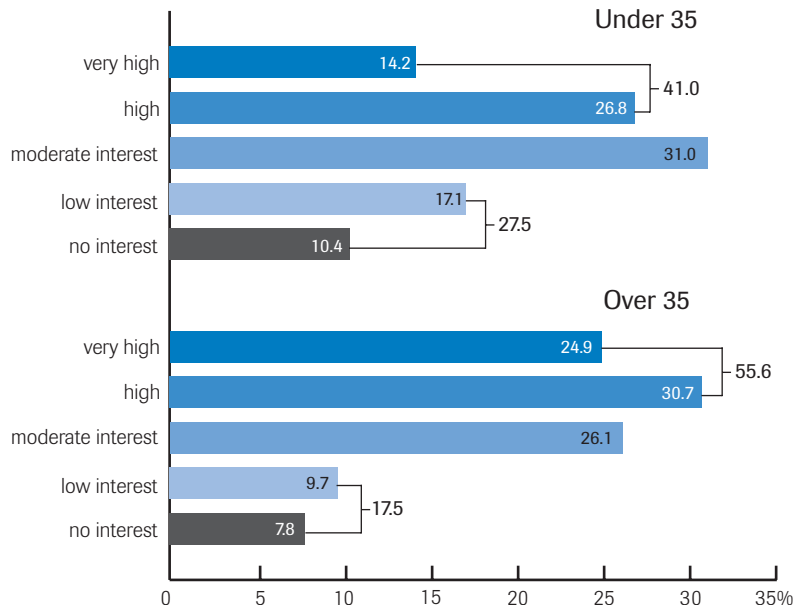
**5.1**

**Commonly held belief:** young adults are not interested in politics.  
**Reality:** under 35s have a moderate level of interest in politics.

Under 35s report a moderate interest in Canadian politics. Respondents were asked, “How would you rate your personal interest in Canadian political issues on a scale of one to five, with one being no interest at all and five being a very high level of interest?” While 4 in 10 respondents rate their interest as a “four” or a “five,” reflecting a high or very high level of interest in Canadian politics, almost 6 in 10 rate their interest as a three (moderate interest) or below. In contrast, over 5 in 10 respondents over 35 rate their interest as high or very high, with one-quarter rating their interest in politics as very high.

**Figure 15: Under35s/Over 35s Interest in Canadian Political Issues**

*“How would you rate your personal interest in Canadian political issues on a scale of one to five, with one being no interest at all and five being a very high level of interest?”*



5.2

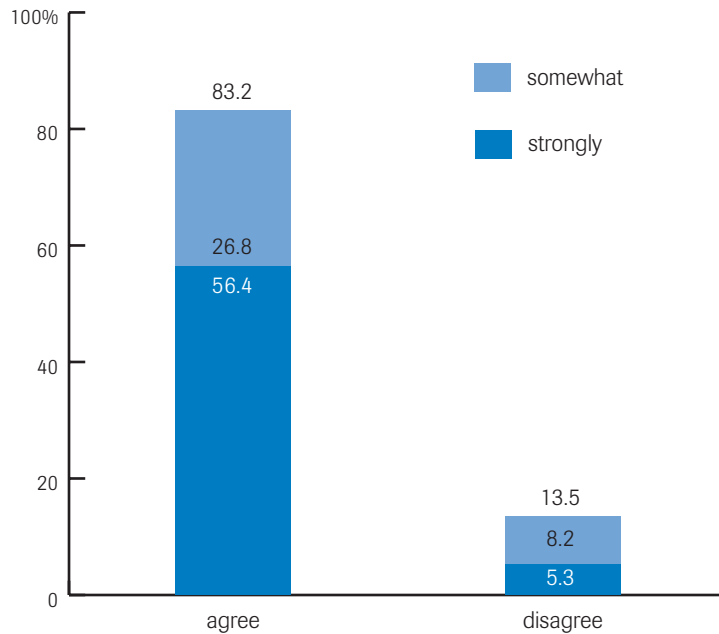
Commonly held belief: young adults do not feel a sense of duty to vote or to help their community.  
 Reality: the vast majority of under 35s feel an obligation to vote and to volunteer.

The vast majority of under 35s feel a sense of duty or obligation to participate in Canadian democratic life. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement “All Canadians who are eligible voters have an obligation to vote,” 8 in 10 agree, with over 5 in 10 strongly agreeing. However, there is a gap between the under 35s and the over 35s on this issue: almost 9 in 10 over 35s agree that there is an obligation to vote, with almost three-quarters strongly agreeing.

The idea of obligation appears to go beyond voting: many under 35s also see volunteer community activities as an obligation. Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “Citizens have an obligation to volunteer in their community.” Although the level of agreement was almost ten percentage points lower than with the voting question, it is striking to see that three-quarters of under 35s agree that community involvement is an obligation. It should be noted that agreement with this statement is weaker than the agreement with the obligation of voting: the plurality of respondents somewhat agree with this statement, compared to the majority that strongly agree with the voting obligation statement. The comparison of responses to these two statements reinforces the strong sense of obligation under 35s feel toward voting.

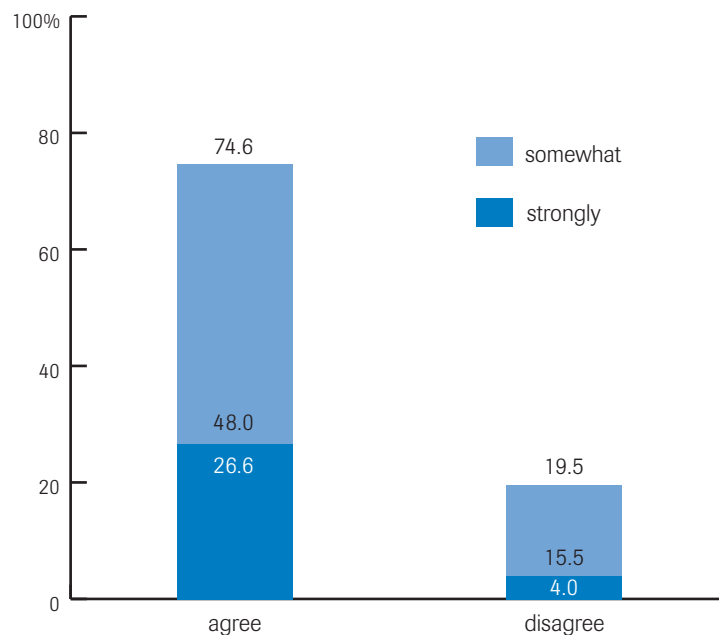
**Figure 16: Under 35s Obligation to Vote**

“All Canadians who are eligible voters have an obligation to vote. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



**Figure 17: Under 35s Obligation to Volunteer**

“Citizens have an obligation to volunteer in their community. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



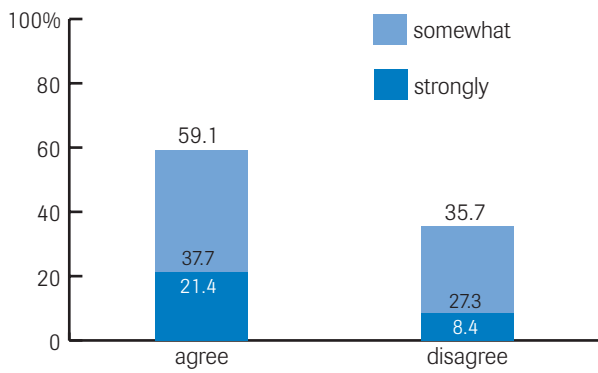
**5.3** Commonly held belief: young adults do not relate to political parties or election campaigns.  
 Reality: it is true – under 35s do not relate to political parties or election campaigns.

When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “Elections rarely deal with the issues that I feel are important,” the majority of under 35s agree, and 2 in 10 strongly agree.

The majority of under 35s also do not feel highly connected to the political parties. Almost 6 in 10 agree with the statement, “There is no political party that I really agree with,” and one-quarter strongly agree with the statement. The level of disaffection among under 35s is consistent across the West – even in Alberta, which is a Conservative Party stronghold at both the federal and provincial levels.

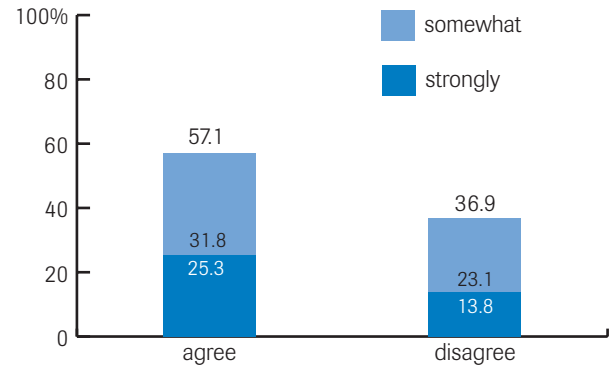
**Figure 18: Under 35s Elections Don’t Deal with Important Issues**

“Elections rarely deal with the issues that I feel are important. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



**Figure 19: Under 35s No Party I Agree With**

“There is no political party that I really agree with. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”

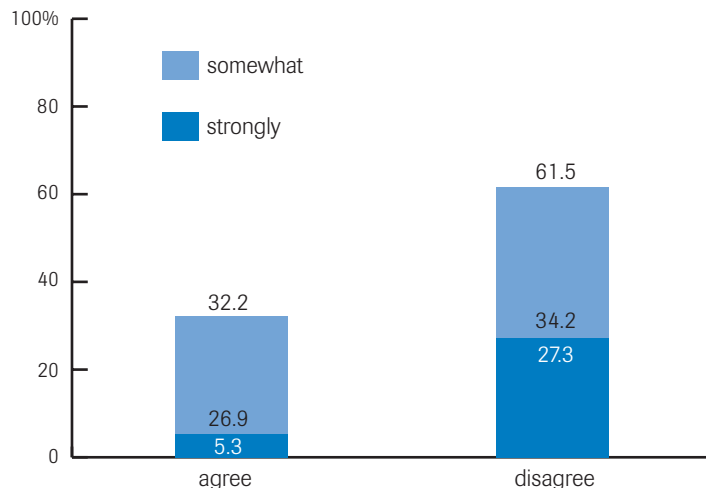


**5.4** Commonly held belief: young adults are cynical about politicians.  
 Reality: it is true – under 35s are cynical about politicians.

Western Canadians under age 35 display considerable cynicism or unease about politicians. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “In general, politicians are trustworthy,” 6 in 10 disagree. In other words, only one-third of western Canadians under 35 agree that politicians are trustworthy, and less than 1 in 10 strongly agree with this statement.

**Figure 20: Under 35s Politicians Trustworthy**

“In general, politicians are trustworthy. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



5.5

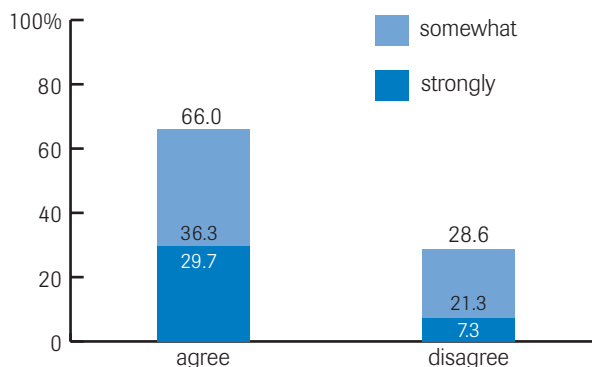
Commonly held belief: young adults are more socialist.

Reality: it is false – under 35s feel people rely on governments too much.

When presented with the statement, “People rely on governments too much,” two-thirds of western Canadians under 35 agree, with 3 in 10 strongly agreeing. It should be noted that over 35s demonstrate even higher levels of agreement, with almost 4 in 10 strongly agreeing. Among under 35s, respondents who describe themselves as very right of centre are more likely to strongly agree with this statement; among over 35s, respondents who describe themselves as very or somewhat right of centre are more likely to strongly agree.

**Figure 21: Under 35s People Rely on Governments Too Much**

“People rely on governments too much. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



5.6

Commonly held belief: young adults are cynical about the media and corporate power.

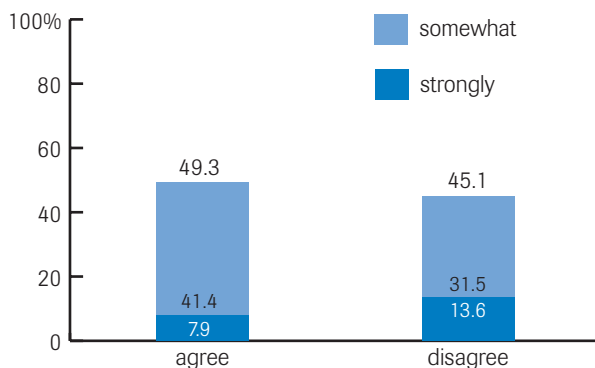
Reality: under 35s are ambivalent about the media, and feel large corporations have excessive power.

While western Canadians under age 35 are clearly distrustful of politicians, they are more ambivalent about the media. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “In general, the news media are trustworthy.” The responses show a near-even split. It is interesting to note, however, that roughly twice as many under 35s strongly disagree than strongly agree that the media are trustworthy.

Many under 35s are also concerned about power outside of government. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “Large corporations have too much power in Canada.” Fully three-quarters agree with this statement, with the plurality (4 in 10) strongly agreeing. It is interesting to note that the over 35s are even more concerned about corporate power: almost 5 in 10 strongly agree with the statement. Clearly, the anti-corporate feelings associated with the backlash against globalization are not the exclusive property of the young. For both under 35s and over 35s, respondents who describe themselves as either very left of centre or somewhat left of centre are more likely to strongly agree that large corporations have too much power.

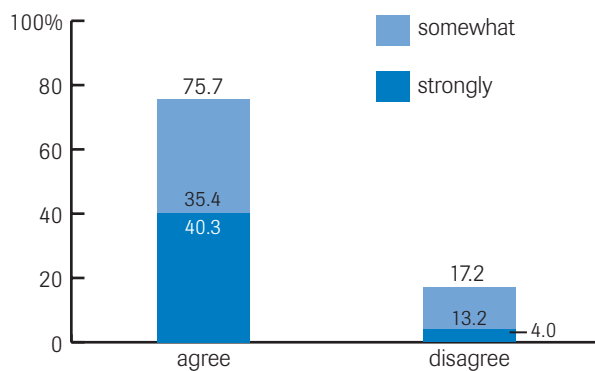
**Figure 22: Under 35s News Media Trustworthy**

“In general, the news media are trustworthy. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



**Figure 23: Under 35s Too Much Corporate Power**

“Large corporations have too much power in Canada. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.”



## 5.7

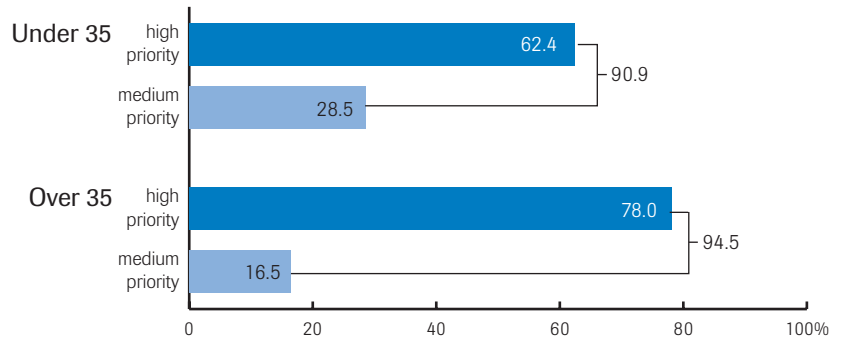
Commonly held belief: young adults are less concerned about government accountability than older adults.  
 Reality: while over 35s are slightly more concerned than under 35s, over 9 in 10 under 35s consider government accountability to be a priority.

To assess public attitudes toward increasing government accountability, Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked to rate the priority of “increasing government accountability.”

Government accountability is clearly a top priority for western Canadians regardless of age: over 9 in 10 rate it as a high or medium priority. However, over 35s are much more likely than under 35s to rate government accountability as a high priority, whereas a sizable number of under 35s rate it as a medium priority.

**Figure 24: Under 35s/Over 35s Increasing Government Accountability**

*“I am now going to ask you some questions about the importance of a few specific public issues. For each issue, please rate its priority to you as either a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority.”*



## 5.8

Commonly held belief: young adults are more cynical about politics than older adults.  
 Reality: the opposite is true – over 35s display levels of cynicism equal to or greater than under 35s.

Taken together, a number of the Looking West 2006 Survey questions suggest that it is *over 35s*, rather than under 35s, who are more cynical about politics:

- Over 35s are more likely than under 35s to state that large corporations have too much power in Canada.
- Over 35s are more likely than under 35s to state that people rely on governments too much.
- Over 35s and under 35s are equally likely to disagree that politicians are trustworthy, and are equally likely to disagree that the media are trustworthy.
- Over 35s and under 35s are equally likely to state that there is no political party that they agree with, and to state that elections rarely deal with issues of importance to them.
- Over 35s are more likely to rate “increasing government accountability” as a high priority.

While the under 35s are clearly dissatisfied on a number of fronts, the over 35s demonstrate even greater levels of discontent with Canadian politics and democracy.

### How Under 35s See Canadian Democracy: Summary

Taken together, these democratic attitudes suggest that many under 35s are less than enthralled with the practice of Canadian politics. Many feel that politicians are untrustworthy, that political parties are out of touch with their interests, that elections fail to address their key concerns, that the scope of government has grown too large and that the power of large corporations is too great. Despite these sentiments, however, western Canadians report a moderate level of interest in politics and a sense of duty toward both voting and volunteerism.

## 6. How Under 35s Participate in Canadian Democracy

Is the future of Canadian democracy in jeopardy? For years, political scientists have expressed concerns about declining voter turnout rates, particularly among young adults, in western democracies. Canada has not been immune to these voter turnout declines, nor has it been immune to the accompanying hand-wringing.

But do declining voter turnout rates bode ominously for Canadian democracy? The Looking West 2006 Survey asked western Canadians about their democratic behaviours. The responses from the under 35s suggest a mix of good and bad news about Canada's democratic future.

**6.1**

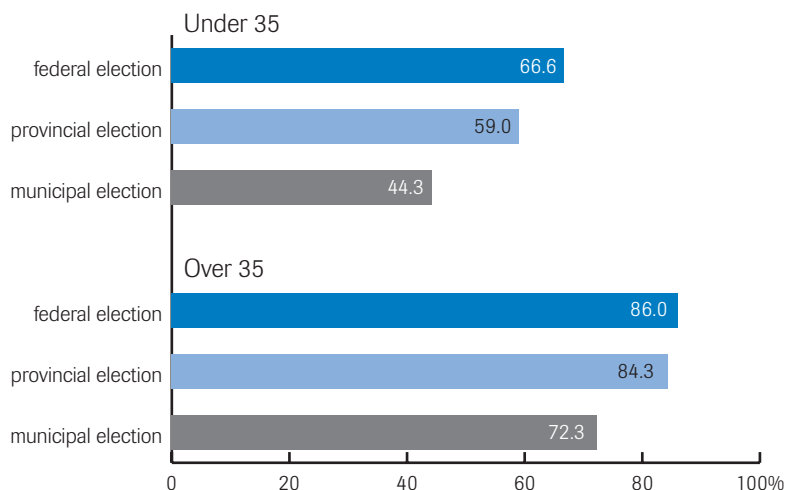
Commonly held belief: young adults are less likely to vote than older adults.

Reality: it is true – under 35s are much less likely to report voting than over 35s.

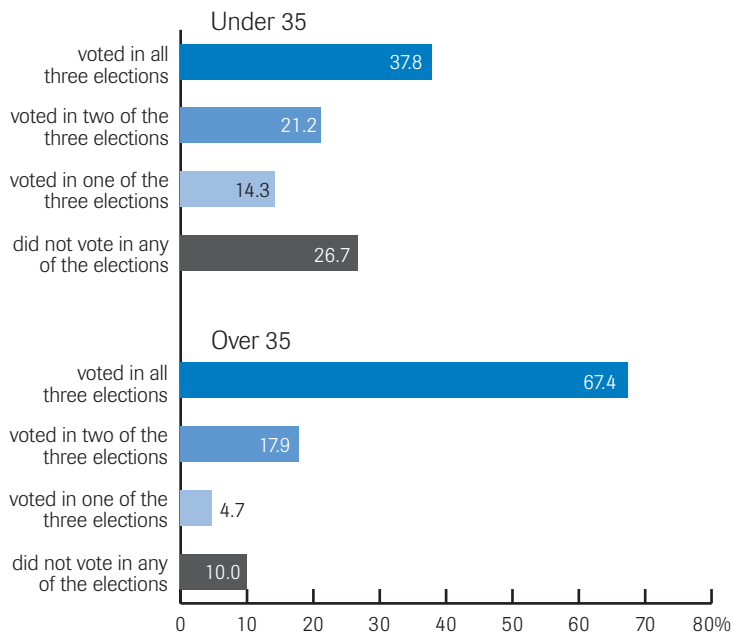
Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked whether they voted in their most recent federal, provincial and municipal elections. It should be noted that the reported voting rates are well above the actual voter turnout rates. (For a more complete discussion of the over-reporting of voting behaviour, see the previous Looking West 2006 Survey report *Democracy in Western Canada* available at [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca).) This over-reporting of voting rates is to be expected: as decades of social science researchers have found, over-reporting of voting is very common, and occurs internationally. Despite the over-reporting of voting, there is value in examining who does and does not report voting; the caution, of course, is that readers are to remember that the analysis is of self-reported voters.

The data support the argument that young adults are less likely to vote. The differences in self-reporting voting behaviour amongst over 35s and under 35s are striking: in the case of the recent federal election, it is a gap of almost 20 percentage points. In the case of the most recent provincial election, the gap jumps to 25 percentage points, and for the most recent municipal election the difference approaches 30 percentage points. One possible explanation – and one that will be explored more fully in the discussion to come – is that the differences in voting behaviour can be explained by the fact that some of the under 35s were under 18 and thus ineligible to vote for at least one of the three elections considered. This is true, but the ineligibility explanation does not go very far, particularly with federal voting. The Looking West 2006 Survey was conducted one month after the 2006 federal election, and the survey was limited to individuals aged 18 and over. Given that only

**Figure 25: Under 35s/Over 35s Self-Reported Voting**



**Figure 26: Under 35s/Over 35s Frequency of Self-Reported Voting**



2% of the under 35s were born in 1988 (18 years prior to the 2006 federal election), ineligibility due to age is clearly of only limited explanatory power when considering the differences in voting behaviour.

When one considers self-reported voting behaviour in all three elections at once, the differences between the under 35s and over 35s become even more striking. While two-thirds of respondents aged 35 and over report voting in all three elections (most recent federal, provincial and municipal), less than 4 in 10 respondents aged 34 and under make the same claim. Only 1 in 10 respondents 35 and over report not voting in any of the elections, compared to over one-quarter of the under 35s.

The voting behaviour differences between young adults and older adults have been noted before, and this is by no means a new or unique finding to the Looking West Survey. That said, it is very troubling for Canadian democracy. The question is, why are young adults not voting? It is to this question that we will now turn.

6.2

Commonly held belief: young adults who do not vote are not voting for political reasons.

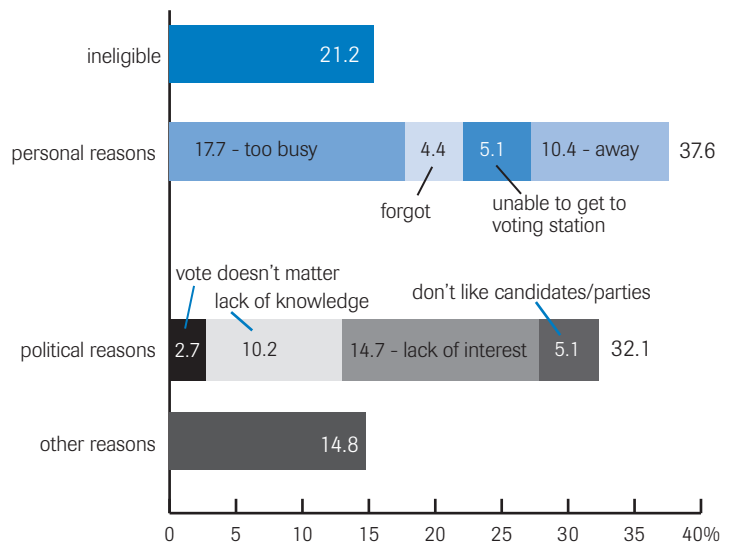
Reality: under 35s are more likely to cite personal reasons for not voting than political reasons.

Respondents who reported that they did not vote in any or all of the recent elections were asked: “You indicated that there have been recent elections in which you did not vote. Why didn’t you vote?” This was an open-ended question, with respondents invited to voluntarily supply their own reason or reasons for not voting.

As Figure 27 demonstrates, there are many reasons why people do not vote. However, it is notable that only 15% of respondents attribute their not voting to being ineligible to vote. Even among respondents under 35 who reported not voting in any of the three elections considered in the survey, only 18% gave ineligibility as their reason. Of those who reported not voting in any of the three elections considered in the survey, over 4 in 10 cited political reasons, while one-quarter cited personal reasons. Respondents who voted in one or two elections were more likely to identify personal reasons as the reason they did not vote in all three elections.

**Figure 27: Under 35s Reasons for Not Voting**

“You indicated that there have been recent elections in which you did not vote. Why didn’t you vote?”



Responses shown are the first reason given for not voting. “Other” includes reasons related to: not knowing where or when to vote; health; relocation; childcare; religion; acclamation; enumeration; “enough of politics”; “have never voted”; weather; working; and other reasons. None of these reasons exceeded 3% of the responses, while many represented less than 1% of responses.

The myriad reasons why people do not vote point to the challenges election officials face in attempting to increase voter turnout.

6.3

Commonly held belief: young adults participate in Canadian democracy in alternate ways.

Reality: it is true – over 60% of under 35s report participating in at least one extra-electoral political activity over the last 12 months.

Democratic participation is not limited to voting; there are many other ways in which citizens can and do get involved in the political process. Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked to report if they engaged in any of the following activities in the past 12 months: “did volunteer activities for a political party; contacted an elected official by letter, email, phone or in person; signed a petition; participated in a public protest or demonstration; made a donation to a political party; participated in an online discussion about political issues; or boycotted goods and services from a particular company for ethical reasons.” As with voting behaviour, it is important to stress that these are self-reported political activities and thus may be subject to respondent over-statement.

For under 35s, the most frequently reported political activity (outside of voting) is signing a petition, with almost 4 in 10 reporting this behaviour in the past 12 months. The second most frequently reported political activity is boycotts: almost 3 in 10 respondents under the age of 35 report boycotting goods and services from a particular company for ethical reasons over the past 12 months.

Two in 10 under 35s report contacting an elected official by letter, email, phone or in person in the last 12 months. On this activity, there is a significant difference – almost 15 percentage points – between the under 35s and over 35s, with over 35s being much more likely to report contacting an elected official.

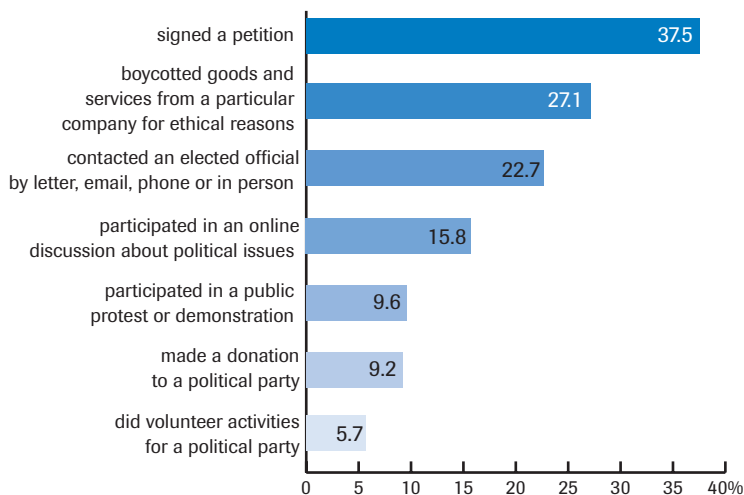
Despite high reported general Internet usage, only 16% of under 35s report participating in an online discussion about political issues. Each of the remaining three political activities – participating in a public protest or demonstration, making a donation to a political party, and volunteering for a political party – are reported by less than 10% of the respondents under age 35. It should be noted that over 35s are twice as likely as under 35s to report making a donation to a political party over the past 12 months.

Over 6 in 10 western Canadians under age 35 engaged in at least one of the seven political activities examined in the survey over the past 12 months, with less than 4 in 10 reporting no activities. While it is rare that individuals will engage in a wide diversity of activities – less than 1 in 10 under 35s report engaging in four or more of the political activities, and less than one half of one percent report engaging in all seven – the high proportion of under 35s who report some form of political activity outside of voting puts the argument that young adults are disinterested in politics into serious question.

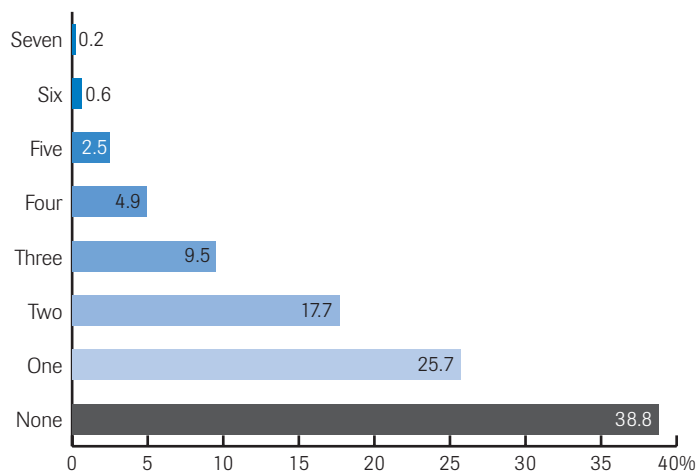
It must be noted that the survey only asked respondents to report on whether or not they participated in an activity, and did not probe how frequently they participated. In other words, it is possible that a respondent only participated in one activity (for example, signing petitions) but did the activity numerous times (i.e., signed many petitions). Thus, Figure 29 provides an indication of the breadth of self-reported political actions, but does not imply information about the frequency or depth of action.

**Figure 28: Under 35s Self-Reported Political Activities in Last 12 Months**

*"Please let me know if you have engaged in any of the following activities in the past 12 months: did volunteer activities for a political party; contacted an elected official by letter, email, phone or in person; signed a petition; participated in a public protest or demonstration; made a donation to a political party; participated in an online discussion about political issues; or boycotted goods and services from a particular company for ethical reasons." Response options: yes, no.*



**Figure 29: Under 35s Number of Self-Reported Political Activities**



**6.4** Commonly held belief: young adults who do not vote participate in Canadian democracy in alternate ways. **Reality:** this is false – under 35s who participate in alternate democratic forms are also voting, while non-voters are not participating at all.

It is sometimes suggested that young adults who do not vote may be participating politically in other ways. However, the Looking West 2006 data suggest otherwise. Almost 6 in 10 of the respondents under age 35 who reported not voting in any of the elections

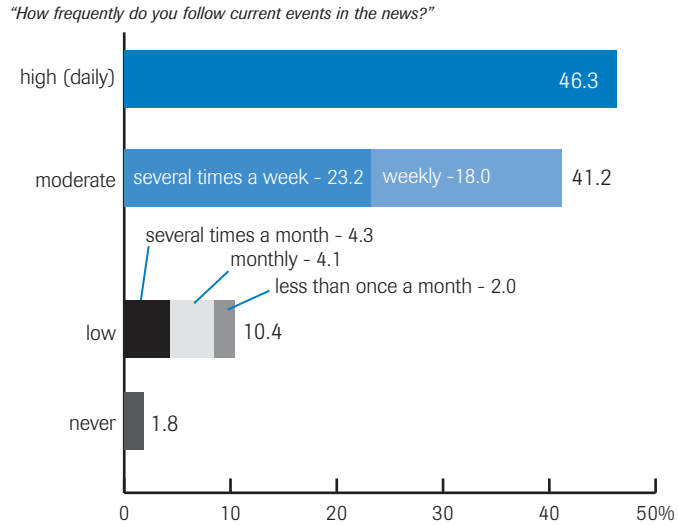


also reported not engaging in any of the seven political activities. In addition, as the number of times voting increases, respondents are less likely to report engaging in no political activities. The conclusion, then, is that in general young adults who are more likely to report voting are also more likely to report engaging in other political activities. (It should be noted that respondents with less than a high school education are more likely than other educational cohorts to report not voting and not participating in any other political activities.)

**6.5** Commonly held belief: young adults do not follow current events.  
**Reality:** most under 35s report following current events, but not necessarily on a daily basis.

To what extent are young adults informed on current events? Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked, “How frequently do you follow current events in the news?” The plurality of respondents under age 35 – over 4 in 10 – report following current events on a daily basis, while another 4 in 10 report following current events either several times a week or weekly. While under 35s are less active followers of current events than are their elders (almost three-quarters of respondents age 35 and over report following current events daily), it would be inaccurate to generalize that young adults are not informed about current events. (Of course, it is possible that under 35s and over 35s differ in their definition of “current events”; this question was beyond the scope of the survey.)

**Figure 30: Under 35s Frequency of Following Current Events**



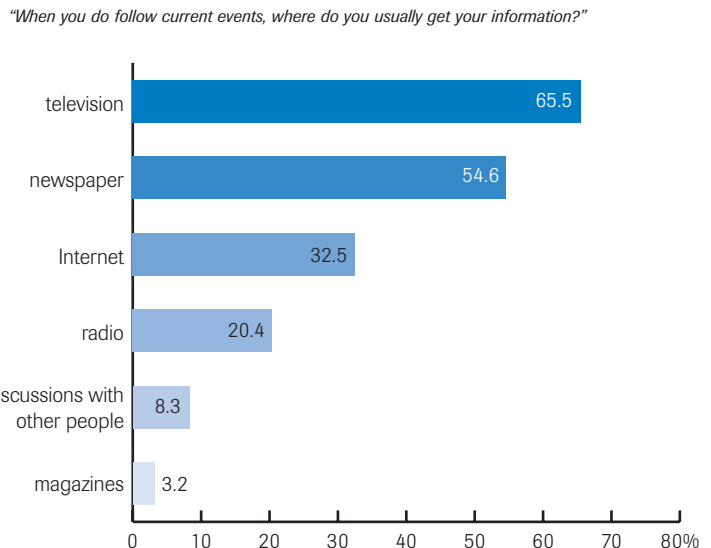
**6.6** Commonly held belief: young adults do not read newspapers.  
**Reality:** the majority of under 35s report reading newspapers.

After being asked about their frequency of following current events, Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked, “When you do follow current events, where do you usually get your information?”

Almost two-thirds of western Canadians under age 35 report getting current events and news from television, while just over 5 in 10 report getting information from newspapers. More under 35s report getting information from the Internet than from the radio. Only 8% of under 35s get their information from discussion with other people, and even fewer get their information from magazines.

It is noteworthy that under 35s are less likely than over 35s to get their current event information from television (76.2% of over 35s), newspapers (63.7% of over 35s) or radio (32.0% of over 35s), and more likely than over 35s to get their information from the Internet (20.9% of over 35s). Clearly, more traditional forms of news media are less relevant to under 35s, while emerging forms of news media are on the rise with young adults.

**Figure 31: Under 35s Source of Current Event Information**



6.7

Commonly held belief: young adults use the Internet at higher rates than older adults.

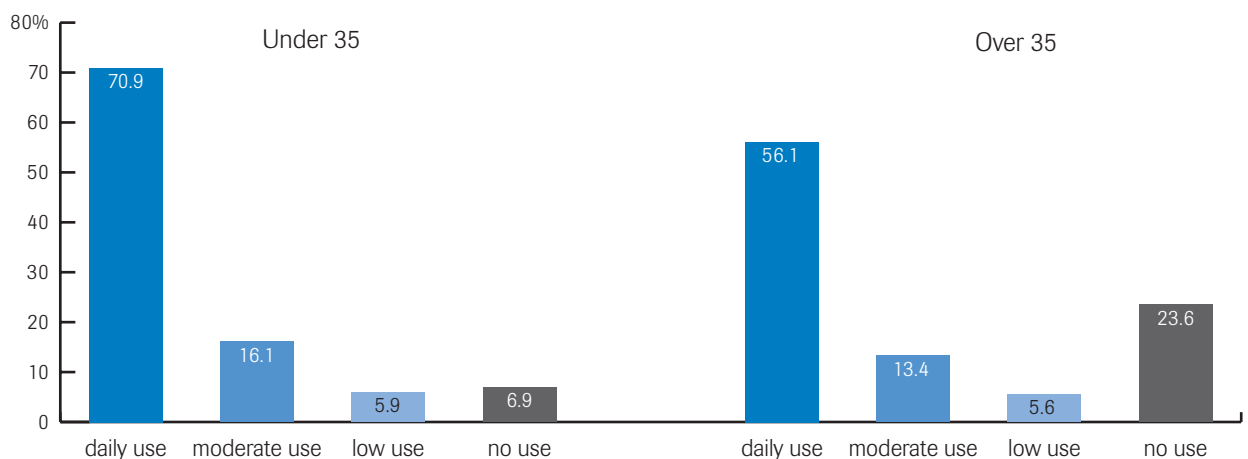
Reality: it is true – under 35s are significantly more likely to use the Internet frequently than are over 35s.

It is perhaps not surprising that one-third respondents of respondents under age 35 get their current event information from the Internet, given that under 35s report very high use of the Internet in general.

Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked, “How often do you use the Internet, including email?” Respondents under age 35 are significantly more likely than respondents over age 35 to use the Internet daily: 7 in 10 under 35s report daily use, compared to just over half of the over 35s. At the other end of the spectrum, almost one-quarter of respondents over the age of 35 report not using the Internet at all, compared to just over 1 in 20 respondents under the age of 35. This begs the question: who are the under 35s who are not using the Internet? Internet non-users under the age of 35 are more likely to be from rural areas, immigrants, Aboriginals, and/or individuals with less than a grade 12 education.

**Figure 32: Under35s/Over 35s Frequency of Internet Use**

“How often do you use the Internet, including email?”



Moderate use category includes responses of "several times per week" and "weekly." Low use category includes responses "several times per month," "monthly" and "less than once a month."

### How Under 35s Participate in Canadian Democracy: Summary

Taken together, what do these results suggest about the future of Canadian democracy? Clearly, there are some points of concern, particularly with respect to the voting behaviour (or lack thereof) of a significant number of young adults.

However, analysts are perhaps too quick to argue that low voter turnout rates among younger citizens are due to apathy. This “blame the citizen” critique is likely unfair. From their attitudes and reported behaviours, it would appear that under 35s are not apathetic: the majority of under 35s report political activities (voting and other forms), many report a moderate-to-high level of interest in politics, and many report following current events in the news.

Rather than seeming apathetic, western Canadians under age 35 appear frustrated with and alienated from political parties and the political process. This is not “western alienation” (which is alienation from the federal government), but rather a much broader dissatisfaction with the entire political process. Young adults’ level of trust in politicians is low. Under 35s do not feel that political parties or elections speak directly to the issues important to them, and it may be this disconnect that leads many to act in ways that may be misinterpreted as apathetic.

The majority of under 35s appear to care very much about Canadian democracy. The challenge is for political parties, candidates and elected officials to find ways in which to more fully engage them.

## 7. How Under 35s See Public Policy

Having examined how under 35s see and participate in Canadian democracy, it is useful to now turn to consider how under 35s assess a number of public policy issues. Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked to rank the priority of 17 policy issues:

- lowering taxes
- protecting the environment
- improving Canada's military
- protecting Canada from terrorist attacks
- increasing government accountability
- reducing health care patient wait times
- developing a national daycare program
- reducing poverty in Canada
- attracting more immigrants to [province]
- addressing social problems faced by Canada's Aboriginal peoples
- improving [province]'s health care system
- improving Canada-US relations
- providing foreign aid to developing countries
- defending human rights in other countries
- toughening up Canada's criminal justice system
- providing funding to parents with children under six
- improving [province]'s post-secondary education system, which includes universities, colleges, technical schools and trades training

Question order was rotated to avoid biases related to placement in the list. It must be acknowledged that this is not an exhaustive list of public policy topics, as that would be beyond the possibility of the survey. In particular, economic topics are underrepresented in this list. However, the list does touch on most of the key contemporary policy debates, as well as on a number of policy issues that are argued to be of particular importance to young adults.

Commonly held belief: young adults are less concerned about “mainstream” Canadian policy issues than other issues.

7.1

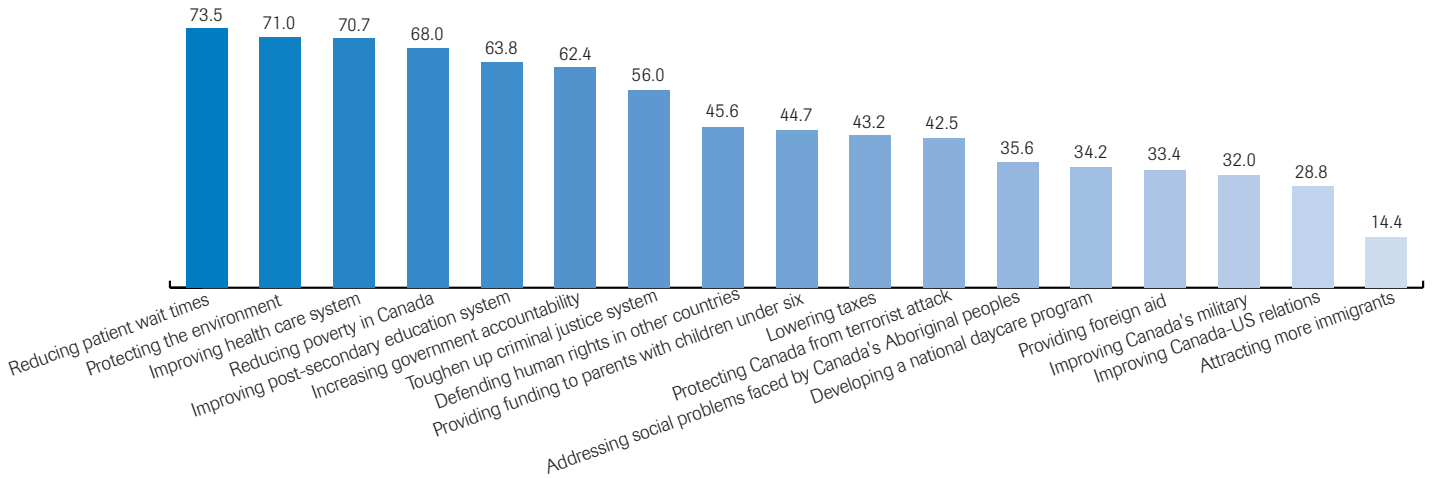
Reality: while many “mainstream” policy issues are important to under 35s, many are not. In addition, under 35s are concerned about a number of issues that receive relatively little public debate.

The number of respondents age 34 and under rating each policy issue as a high priority is presented in Figure 33. There are a number of findings that are of particular interest:

- Canada's most mainstream and perennial policy debate, health care, is of considerable concern to under 35s. Both health care questions – the general question on improving the health care system and the more specific question on reducing health care patient wait times – ranked highly as policy priorities. Reducing patient wait times had a slightly higher number of under 35s rating it as a high priority, but the difference between the two questions was only 3 percentage points.
- For under 35s, protecting the environment is a top priority, roughly equal to health care in importance. Protecting the environment out-ranks increasing government accountability by almost 10 percentage points; clearly, for under 35s cleaning up the environment is of greater interest than cleaning up government.
- As might be expected, improving the post-secondary system is a high priority for the majority of western Canadians under age 35.
- Although reducing poverty is not a top issue of political debate nationally or provincially in western Canada, it is a top concern for western Canadian young adults, with roughly two-thirds of respondents aged 34 and under rating this issue as a high priority. It is interesting to note that while reducing poverty ranks very highly, addressing social problems faced by Canada's Aboriginal peoples receives a high priority ranking from only about one-third of respondents under age 35.
- Many of the policy areas that dominate public debate – such as lowering taxes, improving the military, improving Canada-US relations and childcare/funding for parents – are specified as a high priority by less than a majority of western Canadians under 35.

- Western Canadians under 35 are more likely to rate defending human rights in other countries as a high priority than lowering taxes in Canada.
- Western Canadians under 35 favour funding to parents over a national daycare system; the difference between the two is significant at 10 percentage points.
- Despite considerable debate in recent years about the Canada-US relationship, this policy topic is not of great concern for the under 35s, and is placed 16 out of the 17 policy priorities considered in the survey.

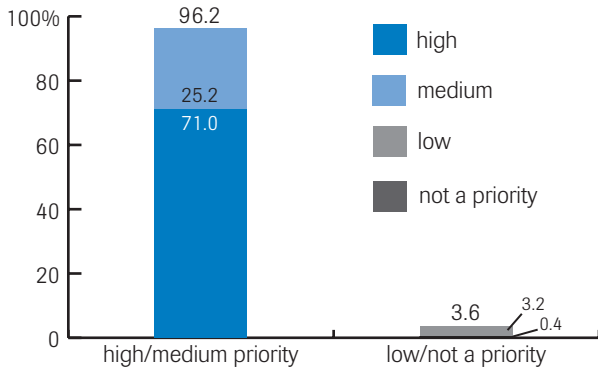
**Figure 33: Under 35s Policy Area is a “High Priority”**



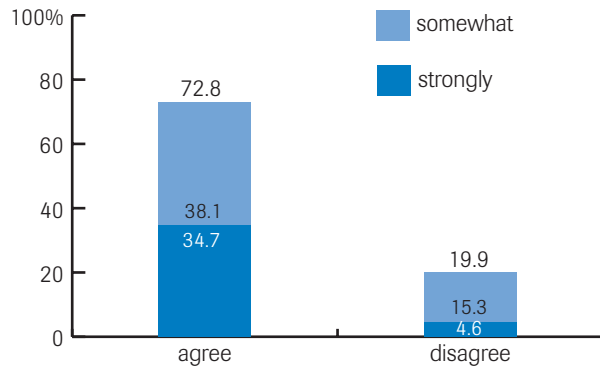
**7.2**

Commonly held belief: young adults are highly concerned about the environment.  
 Reality: it is true – under 35s are highly concerned about the environment (as are over 35s).

**Figure 34: Under 35s Protecting the Environment**



**Fig. 35: Under 35s Concerned About Long-term Environmental Damage**



As past Looking West Surveys have demonstrated, environmental issues are a top concern to many western Canadians. Looking West 2006 Survey respondents were asked two questions about the environment. First, they were asked to rate the priority of “protecting the environment.” Second, they were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “I am concerned that economic growth may result in long-term environmental damage to Canada.”

Almost all western Canadians under 35 (and over 35, for that matter) rate protecting the environment as a high or medium priority, with less than 4% rating it as a low priority or not a priority. Indeed, when looking at high and medium priority ratings combined, the environment garners greater support than any other policy issue addressed in the survey. In addition, almost three-quarters of western Canadians under age 35 are concerned about the long-term environmental impact of economic growth.

**7.3** Commonly held belief: top policy issues for young adults are different from top policy issues for older adults.  
**Reality:** there are a number of important policy priority differences between the under 35s and over 35s, particularly with respect to international relations.

When comparing the relative high priority rankings of the 17 policy areas for the under 35s and the over 35s, a number of interesting differences are seen:

- While government accountability sits at the top of the high priority list for the over 35s, it does not make it into the top five for the under 35s.
- Under 35s are more likely than over 35s to rate improving the post-secondary education system as a high priority. Conversely, over 35s are more likely than under 35s to rate criminal justice and terrorism as high priorities.
- There are important differences between the under 35s and over 35s with respect to the international relations topics. Under 35s are significantly more likely than over 35s to rate protecting human rights in other countries and providing aid to developing countries as high priorities, and are significantly less likely than over 35s to rate improving Canada's military and improving Canada-US relations as high priorities. Looking at the 16th ranked (second last) priority for each age cohort is telling: under 35s have Canada-US relations in the second-to-last position, whereas over 35s have foreign aid in this spot.
- Whereas over 35s display little difference in the priority of a national daycare system versus funding to parents, under 35s appear to prefer the funding to parents model, as there is almost a 10 percentage point gap in favour of funding to parents as a high priority.

**Figure 36: Under 35s/Over 35s "High Priority" Issues**

Under 35s		%	Over 35s		%
1.	Wait times	73.5	1.	Accountability	78.0
2.	Environment	71.0	2.	Wait times	76.9
3.	Health	70.7	3.	Health care	74.0
4.	Poverty	68.0	4.	Environment	70.1
5.	Post-secondary education	63.8	5.	Criminal justice	66.1
6.	Accountability	62.4	6.	Poverty	65.7
7.	Criminal justice	56.0	7.	Post-secondary education	57.1
8.	Human rights	45.6	8.	Terrorism	48.1
9.	Funding to parents	44.7	9.	Lowering taxes	43.8
10.	Lowering taxes	43.2	10.	Military	39.2
11.	Terrorism	42.5	11.	Aboriginal	37.6
12.	Aboriginal	35.6	12.	Canada-US relations	35.6
13.	Daycare	34.2	13.	Human rights	33.1
14.	Foreign aid	33.4	14.	Daycare	30.5
15.	Military	32.0	15.	Funding to parents	29.6
16.	Canada-US relations	28.8	16.	Foreign aid	20.7
17.	Immigration	14.4	17.	Immigration	15.7

### **How Under 35s See Public Policy: Summary**

Many of the issues that are rated as high priorities by the under 35s – in particular, health care/wait times and the environment – are issues that are clearly important to the over 35s as well, and are issues that have received and will continue to receive considerable public debate. However, there are a number of issues that are important to under 35s that receive relatively scant public debate and attention. Young adults' concerns about post-secondary education are by and large ignored in public debate, despite growing demands for current and future skilled labour. Human rights in other countries and foreign aid to developing countries can hardly be described as significant policy debates in Canada. This begs the question: if young adults were to become more involved and engaged in the Canadian political process, would the face of Canada's debate be altered?

## 8. Under 35s and the Future of Western Canada

The Looking West 2006 Survey reveals a number of facts about western Canadians age 18-34. Generally speaking, under 35s see themselves as political centrists (with perhaps a slight left-ward lean). They are more concerned about international issues than are western Canadians aged 35 and over. They are less likely than their elders to identify themselves by geography, but still tend to closely identify themselves with Canada, western Canada, their province, and their local areas. They are quite cynical about Canadian democracy, and this has fueled a feeling of political disconnection. And, reports of political apathy to the contrary, most of them do have at least a moderate interest in politics and report some sort of recent political action.

What does all of this mean for the future of western Canada and of the country?

**Potential for a new generation of western alienation.** The relative confidence (and perhaps complacency) in the future of national unity, coupled with the considerably high level of indifference or negativity toward the place of Quebec in Confederation, suggests that future national unity efforts designed to keep Quebec in the national fold will be a hard sell among western Canadians under age 35. It is not hard to envisage a scenario in which a federal government, seeking to woo Quebec, will come under harsh criticism from the under 35s of western Canada, thus fueling a new generation of western discontent.

**Potential for increased democratic disengagement.** It is sometimes argued that young non-voters are participating in Canadian democracy in other ways, such as protest behaviour. However, the self-reported voting and democratic participation data strongly suggest that this belief is false: young non-voters are abstaining from most facets of Canadian democratic life. Given that non-voting is increasing amongst young people, this suggests that all forms of democratic engagement might be expected to decline in the years ahead.

**Potential for an expanded or altered public policy debate.** If – and this is a big if – under 35s can be brought more fully into the political process at all levels, from voting and letter writing to engagement in political parties and running for office, there is the potential for the scope of policy debate in Canada to be somewhat altered or expanded. Under 35s are more likely to be vocal on international issues, particularly those that are infrequently voiced in current debate.

**Potential for a growing Manitoba/Saskatchewan – Alberta/BC labour and population divide.** When it comes to growth, western Canada already has an east-west divide. The high anticipated mobility of young adults, particularly those from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, suggests that this divide may grow, rather than contract, in the years ahead, unless these provinces make strong efforts to retain their young people, particularly their future “best and brightest.” These efforts will likely need to focus on career opportunities and quality of life, particularly in the large cities.

Under 35s represent the future of western Canada. They are the future political, business and community leaders. They are the current and future employees, workforce, taxpayers and service consumers. They are the current and future parents of the next generation of western Canadians. The Looking West 2006 Survey presents evidence of a significant disconnect between under 35s and conventional political life such as political parties and election campaigns. It is in the interest of all western Canadians – regardless of age – to identify ways to address and reduce this disconnect so to best ensure that the region can fully benefit from everything the West’s young adults have to offer. ■

## About the Canada West Foundation

### **Our Vision**

A dynamic and prosperous West in a strong Canada.

### **Our Mission**

A leading source of strategic insight, conducting and communicating non-partisan economic and public policy research of importance to the four western provinces, the territories, and all Canadians.

Canada West Foundation is a registered Canadian charitable organization incorporated under federal charter (#11882 8698 RR 0001).

In 1970, the One Prairie Province Conference was held in Lethbridge, Alberta. Sponsored by the University of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge Herald, the conference received considerable attention from concerned citizens and community leaders. The consensus at the time was that research on the West (including BC and the Canadian North) should be expanded by a new organization. To fill this need, the Canada West Foundation was created under letters patent on December 31, 1970. Since that time, the Canada West Foundation has established itself as one of Canada's premier research institutes. Non-partisan, accessible research and active citizen engagement are hallmarks of the Foundation's past, present and future endeavours. These efforts are rooted in the belief that a strong West makes for a strong Canada.

More information can be found at [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca).



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